

LITERATURE CITED

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A MODEST PLEA IN FAVOR OF DIVERS TAXONS.—Dr. Lam's coining of the term taxon is another demonstration that necessity is the mother of invention. The sudden popularity of the word, with an acquired double meaning, perhaps illustrates the equally true converse, that invention is the mother of necessity. Having acquired a felicitous term to use in one area, we suddenly discover how badly we needed just such a term in a closely parallel one. There is nothing wrong with using the same term in both. The English word "man" signifies something concrete and individual, something concrete but generalized, and, further, something abstract and generalized. No difficulty arises from all this. If we were to carry over the idea of strictly segregated terms, we should not be allowed to say "man is a warm-blooded

animal." We should have to say carefully, "mankind is a warm-blooded animal." Or perhaps we should have to coin a third intermediate term to make this statement, and reserve the existing compound one to use when speaking of the spirit or the progress of mankind. This would be quite needlessly pedantic. Actual usage is far more decisive than formal definitions. "Taxon" is here to stay for concrete as well as abstract uses, regardless of the narrow meaning originally intended, and both uses are legitimate. But Morton is justified in saying that the "unlimited extension of the meaning is not only ridiculous, it is worse, not precise" (RHODORA 59: 43, 1957). Certainly if one is talking about species, one ought to say species, in preference to the indefinite term taxon. There are times, however, when the latter collective term is preferable. Surely it is better to shorten "species, varieties, and forms of *Panicum*, for example, to "taxa of (or within) *Panicum*." This involves literary taste and judgment, which cannot be subjected to precise rules. Scientists—especially in present-day America—are not notable for their talents in the way of literary expression, and unfortunately we shall have to endure another over-worked cliché, ranking with "the literature," "workers," and "the authors." If Morton's protest puts a stop to the excessive use of "taxon" on every possible occasion (and some impossible ones), without discernment or feeling for appropriateness and precision, he will have accomplished a miracle. But however scanty any optimism about the results, it is good to know that at least one American botanist has sufficient awareness and concern to express himself in print. "The literature" (grotesque phrase) grows constantly more stereotyped, more "acceptable," and more zombie-like.

The plural of taxon is another matter of literary taste. The officially prescribed plural, taxa, is of course correct for Latin or Greek. But in English, taxons is to me a more natural form. I prefer it, just as I prefer indexes to indices. Neither form is either more or less correct than the other. The word museum is so thoroughly naturalized that almost never does any plural except museums occur in common usage. Herbarium is a less well-established word, and rather inconsistently, the usual plural is herbaria. At times I prefer herbariums, but feel no need to be consistent about it. The excessive popu-

larity of "taxa" perhaps is symptomatic of two things: the appalling modern American eagerness to conform, and the chance to feel oneself a classical scholar of sorts without having to put forth any effort. Probably the most extreme example of an attempt to create the appearance of scholarship without any learning is the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, the major portion of which now consists of "push-button" instructions (often contradictory, frequently incorrect, rarely indicative of literary taste or understanding) about Latin and Greek names, for those ignorant of classical languages and, one must assume, obstinate about not trying to learn. The practical unworkability of the multitude of instructions has long been painfully evident in zoological publications. It is obvious to anyone who tries to read through them, but apparently hardly anyone really does. It is a pity that botanists are not better acquainted with the Zoological Code; they would appreciate the great superiority of their own. Some of the worst features of the zoological one are persistently offered for incorporation in the botanical. Among these are proposals to lay down rigid regulations about the handling of Greek and Latin, of which the prescribed plural "taxa" is a minor example. It is neither necessary nor at all desirable to lay down a botanical (or zoological) law for all the minutiae. One cannot escape the fact that a certain amount of literary taste will always be involved. Experience has already shown the impossibility of strict regimentation.

So:—long live taxons, whatever the kind!—LLOYD H. SHINNERS, SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY, DALLAS 5, TEXAS.

DRABA LANCEOLATA IN THE OTTAWA DISTRICT.¹ On May 23, 1947, three immature specimens of an unknown species of *Draba* were collected on the face of the Pre-Cambrian escarpment about ten miles northwest of the city of Ottawa. Up until this time only the easily recognized *Draba nemorosa* L. had been known in the vicinity of Ottawa. This, then, was a species new to the district, but final identification of the immature specimens was not possible.

It was not until July 6, 1956, that an opportunity arose to

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